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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000128

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SUBJECT: A/S SHANNON'S MEETING WITH ARGENTINE FOREIGN
MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Lino Gutierrez for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon, accompanied by the Ambassador, met with Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana on January 12. During the conversation, which focused on Bolivia, A/S Shannon defined key U.S. concerns about the incoming Evo Morales administration and underscored the importance of active Argentine involvement in promoting democratic governance and institutions in Bolivia. FM Taiana acknowledged the margin of Morales's victory had surprised the GOA and said it was still not clear what direction the new Bolivian government would eventually take. Prior to the Taiana meeting, A/S Shannon also met separately with Deputy Foreign Minister Roberto Garcia Moritan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) A/S Shannon, accompanied by Ambassador, PolCouns, and PolOff, met with Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana on January 12. Taiana was accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Roberto Garcia Moritan, Under Secretary for Latin American Policy Leonardo Franco, Director of North American Affairs Vicente Espeche Gil, and Argentine Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Octavio Bordon.

¶3. (C) A/S Shannon told Taiana that the U.S. had "no illusions" about future relations with the Morales administration but would approach the new government "in good faith." A/S Shannon noted that Morales's rhetoric had softened somewhat recently but was still very personal and, at times, aggressive, complicating our efforts to begin a dialogue. A second key area to our future relations would be the Morales response to our counternarcotics programs. A/S Shannon asked how we approach the new government on this issue without provoking immediate problems and confrontation. He noted that while he understood that cocoa growers were the original base of support for Morales, eradication remained a key part of U.S. anti-drug strategy in Bolivia along with interdiction and development programs. The Assistant Secretary said Argentine and Brazilian involvement would be key in maintaining democratic institutions in Bolivia.

14. (C) FM Taiana acknowledged the difficulties that lay ahead for Bolivia. He said the margin of victory Morales obtained in the December elections had come as a surprise to the GOA. However, despite Morales's majority, there was still no answer as to "what is Bolivia" and that the Bolivian social compact was essentially "broken." Taiana said the indigenous angle to the elections was "unprecedented" not only for Bolivia but for South America. He opined that Morales viewed himself as "the Nelson Mandela" of indigenous Bolivians but that it was still not clear how much influence the indigenous movement would have in the new government.

15. (C) In an earlier meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Roberto Garcia Moritan, A/S Shannon said that Argentina and Brazil have important interests in Bolivia. He said the U.S. faced a diplomatic challenge with the Morales government, but that the first step would be to start a dialogue and see what is possible. He said that we faced two obstacles to that dialogue. The first was Morales's rhetoric, which was personal and reflected the confrontational tactics of Chavez. The second barrier was Morales's position on our counternarcotics program. Since so much bilateral assistance is tied to the GOB's counter-drug performance, our overall relationship will suffer across the board if the counternarcotics program falls apart. Shannon said we want to coordinate our actions with the GOA, and also use multilateral instruments like the Inter-American Commission on Drug Control (CICAD).

16. (C) Garcia Moritan said the success of Bolivian democracy was very important and the GOA intended to help the Bolivians achieve success. He said if Morales asks the GOA for help "we will see what we can offer." Under Secretary for Latin

American Policy Leonardo Franco said the GOA was working on a variety of bilateral projects in the areas of trade, education, and technical assistance for a possible constitutional reform. The GOA was also looking at Bolivia's entry into MERCOSUR as a full member. Franco praised the United States for its "mature reaction" to Morales's electoral victory.

17. (C) On the question of drugs, Garcia Moritan said the GOA would work closely with Bolivia and liked the idea of using regional mechanisms like CICAD. He said it was important to watch Morales's actions rather than his words and cautioned against painting Morales as a narcotrafficker.
GUTIERREZ